

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 SAM-01 IO-10 CIAE-00

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P R 241230Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7285

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RABAT 6231

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MO SS SP MR AG

SUBJECT: VISITORS TO SAHARA FIND MOROCCANS HAVE SITUATION WELL
IN HAND

1. SUMMARY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR AND PRESS ATTACHE
VISITED SAHARA DEC. 22-23. MOROCCAN MILITARY CONTROL OF
EL AYOUN AND SMARA APPEARS IMPRESSIVELY FIRM, BUT GRIP
ON NORTHEASTERN PART OF TERRITORY REMAINS TO BE CONSOLIDATED.
MOROCCAN, SPANISH AND MAURITANIAN AUTHORITIES IN EL AYOUN
WARMLY LAUDED SMOOTH TRANSFER OF POWER. IN EL AYOUN AREA,
SPANISH MILITARY NOW CONTROL ONLY EMBARKATION POINTS AT
AIRPORT AND BEACH. THEY PLAN TURNOVER OF VILLA CISNEROS
JAN. 15. MORONCANS IN EL AYOUN VIEW CONSULTATIONS WITH
SAHARANS AS HAVING BEEN CARRIED OUT, CLAIMING SUPPORT OF
MAJORITY OF MEMBERS OF SAHARA ASSEMBLY. END SUMMARY.
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2. POLITICAL COUNSELOR AND PRESS ATTACHE VISITED EL AYOUN, SMARA AND JDIRIYA DEC. 22-23 WITH GROUP OF FOREIGN AND MOROCCAN JOURNALISTS AND EMBASSY PRESS ATTACHES AT INVITATION OF MOROCCAN MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. TOUR UNDOUBTEDLY DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE (A) FIRMNESS OF MOROCCAN CONTROL AND EXAGGERATED NATURE OF POLISARIO CLAIMS OF SUCCESS, (B) ENTHUSIASM OF SAHARANS FOR "RE-INTEGRATION" WITH MOROCCO, AND (C) CLOSENESS OF COOPERATION AMONG MOROCCANS, SPANIARDS AND MAURITANIANS IN EFFECTING TRANSFER OF POWER IN SAHARA. MOROCCAN MEDIA ALSO COVERED TOUR EXTENSIVELY, NO DOUBT FOR USE WITH MOROCCAN AUDIENCES IN MAKING SOME OF SAME POINTS.

3. ATMOSPHERE: EL AYOUN AND SMARA HAVE BECOME VIRTUAL ARMED CAMPS. CIVILIAN POPULATION OF THESE TOWNS HAS OBVIOUSLY DIMINISHED CONSIDERABLY FROM LAST YEAR'S SPANISH CENSUS OF 27,000 FOR EL AYOUN AND 4,500 FOR SMARA. NEVERTHELESS, FAIR NUMBERS OF LOCAL CITIZENS ARE IN EVIDENCE AND, ACCORDING TO MOROCCAN AUTHORITIES, LIFE IS RETURNING GRADUALLY TO NORMAL AS THOSE WHO HAD LEFT TOWNS OUT OF FEAR GAIN CONFIDENCE IN MOROCCANS. RECENT RAINS, FIRST IN MANY YEARS, HAD ALSO LED TO DEPARTURE FROM TOWNS OF MANY SAHARANS ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE, IT WAS EXPLAINED. IN EL AYOUN, VISITORS WITNESSED SPIRITED DEMONSTRATION OF SAHARANS CHEERING FOR KING HASSAN AND MOROCCO, AS WELL AS NUMBER OF PRESENTATIONS TO MOROCCAN GOVERNOR BENSODA OF PLEDGES OF ALLEGIANCE, TO WHICH BENSODA RESPONDED ON THEME THAT SAHARAN UNITY WITH MOROCCO HAD NOW BEEN COMPLETED.

4. MEETING WITH TRIPARTITE AUTHORITIES: VISITORS WERE OFFICIALLY WELCOMED DEC. 22 AT A RECEPTION BY SPANISH GOVERNOR SALAZAR, HIS DEPUTY COLONEL VIGURI, MOROCCAN SECRETARY GENERAL OF INTERIOR DRISS BASRI (IN TEMPORARY ABSENCE OF BENSODA), MAURITANIAN GOVERNOR OULD RACHID, SAHARAN ASSEMBLY (JEMAA) PRESIDENT KHATRI JOUMANI, AND VARIOUS SUBORDINATES. FOLLOWING SUBSTANTIVE POINTS EMERGED:

A. TRIPARTITE COOPERATION: ALL PARTIES HAD HIGHEST PRAISE FOR CLOSE COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTING NOV. 14 MADRID CONFIDENTIAL

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AGREEMENT. MOROCCANS STRESSED HOPE THAT MANY SPANIARDS WOULD REMAIN IN SAHARA AND NEW ONES WOULD COME TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY.

B. SPANISH PLANS: GENERAL SALAZAR INDICATED THAT MILITARY CONTROL OF EL AYOUN HAD BEEN PASSED ENTIRELY TO THE MOROCCANS ON DEC. 20, LEAVING SPANISH WITH ONLY EMBARKATION POINTS AT AIRPORT AND BEACH PENDING COMPLETION OF EVACUATION OF

FURTHER SPANISH PERSONNEL IN NEAR FUTURE. SALAZAR IPANNED TO LEAVE EL AYOUN IN EARLY JANUARY FOR VILLA CISNEROS, WHICH HE EXPECTED TO TRANSFER ON JAN. 15. THEREAFTER, COLONEL VIGURI WAS TO REPRESENT SPAIN IN SAHARA UNTIL FEB. 28 TERMINATION OF SPANISH ROLE. SPANIARDS ALSO NOTED THAT THE 1,800 SPANISH WORKERS AT BOU CRAA PHOSPHATE MINES WERE TO MAKE UP THEIR MINDS WHETHER TO STAY ON JOB WHEN THEIR LEAVE EXPIRED JAN 11.

C. CONSULTATION OF SAHARANS: ASKED HOW CONSULTATIONS OF SAHARANS IN ACCORDANCE WITH RECENT RESOLUTION WAS TO BE CARRIED OUT, GENERAL SALAZAR RESPONDED, "THROUGH THE JEMAA." HE SAID THAT IN LAST MAJOR SESSION OF JEMAA ON NOV. 29, ON OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN GOVERNORS, A "MAJORITY" OF MEMBERS HAD PRONOUNCED THEMSELVES IN FAVOR OF THE MADRID ACCORD. (COL. VIGURI WAS QUOTED BY MOROCCAN PRESS DEC. 24 AS SAYING 72 MEMBERS HAD ENDORSED ACCORD.) SPANIARDS INDICATED THAT OF THE ORIGINAL 102 MEMBERS, ONE HAD DIED AND ANOTHER HAD BEEN KILLED IN FIGHTING AT LA GUERA, THUS LEAVING THE MEMBERSHIP AT 100. (DRISS BASRI HAD EARLIER EVALUATED REMAINING MEMBERSHIP AT ABOUT 94 OR 95, UNDERLINING THAT HE NOT STRONG ON STATISTICS. HE STATED THAT MOROCCO POSSESSED WRITTEN ALLEGIANCE FROM A "MAJORITY" OF THE JEMAA, BUT WOULD NOT BE DRAWN OUT ON A SPECIFIC FIGURE). IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT REPORTS OF DEFECTION OF MAJORITY OF JEMAA MEMBERS, SPANIARDS DISPARAGED CREDIBILITY OF POLISARIO, WHICH, THEY MAINTAINED, HAD BEEN COMPLETELY UNDERMINED BY FANTASTIC CLAIMS. KHATRI JOUMANI ASSERTED THAT THE FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF JEMAA AND SOME OTHER MEMBERS HAD BEEN COERCED INTO LEAVING EL AYOUN BY POLISARIO. HE SAID THAT JEMAA MEMBERS STILL MEETING IN EL AYOUN. REPLACEMENTS WERE TO BE ELECTED SHORTLY FOR THOSE WHO HAD LEFT.

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AD. MAURITANIAN ASPECTS: OULD RACHID WAS A ENTHUSIASTIC AS OTHERS IN LAUDING TRIPARTITE COOPERATION. RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS, HE COMMENTED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN MOROCQM AND MAURITANIA IN SAHARA WOULD BE DRAWN, WHICH HE SAW AS A TASK FOR HIGHER LEVELS. GENERAL SALAZAR, IN DISCUSSING TURNOVER OF VILLA CISNEROS, STUDIOUSLY AVOIDED SPECIFYING TO WHOM IT WOULD BE TURNED OVER. MEMBER OF MAURITANIAN DELEGATION PROFESSED IGNORANCE AS TO ROLE HIS COUNTRY WOULD PLAY IN VILLA CISNEROS. IN SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE MEETING WITH JOURNALISTS, DRISS BASRI STATED THAT MOROCCAN FORCES WOULD OCCUPY VILLA CISNEROS. (COMMENT: THERE WAS SPECULATION IN EL AYOUN THAT A MAJOR DETAIL REMAINING TO BE WORKED OUT BETWEEN RABAT AND NOUAKCHOTT WAS WHETHER NEW BORDER WOULD FALL TO NORTH OR SOUTH OF VILLA CISNEROS. MOROCCAN MILITARY OCCUPATION

WOULD SEEM TO WEIGHT ISSUE IN MOROCCAN FAVOR, ALTHOUGH SUCH OCCUPATION THEORETICALLY WOULD NOT PREVENT EVENTUAL MAURITANIAN ACQUISITION).

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PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 NEAE-00 OMB-01 AID-05 EB-07

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P R 241230Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7286

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

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E. CAPTURE OF LA GUERA: OULD RACHID COMMENTED THERE HAD BEEN ONLY LIGHT CASUALTIES ON BOTH SIDES IN RECENT MAURITANIAN CAPTURE OF LA GUERA FROM POLISARIO, AND THAT "MANY" POLISARIO PRISONERS HAD BEEN TAKEN AND WOULD BE TREATED WITH TRADITIONAL MAURITANIAN HUMANENESS. HE STATED CATEGORICALLY THAT NO MOROCCAN TROOPS HAD BEEN INVOLVED AT LA GUERA (CONTRARY TO REPORTS TO THAT EFFECT). QUERIED ABOUT RECENT PRESS STORIES THAT ALGERIAN-FLAG VESSELS HAD LANDED REINFORCEMENTS AT LA GUERA, RACHID SAID ORIGINS OF REINFORCEMENTS NOT KNOWN. HE THOUGHT MOST PLAUSIBLE THAT SMALL MOTOR CRAFT OR SAILING VESSELS HAD BEEN USED BUT THESE HAD NOT ACTUALLY BEEN OBSERVED.

F. POLISARIO: DRISS BASRI PRIVATELY ESTIMATED CURRENT

POLISARIO STRENGTH AT 800 ACTIVE ARMED MEN, WHILE
OTHER INFORMED OBSERVERS PUT NUMBER AT 1500-2000. BASRI
NOTED THAT SPANIARDS IN NOVEMBER HAD ASSESSED POLISARIO
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SYMPATHISERS AT ABOUT 10,000, BUT BASRI FELT THAT SAHARANS'
KEEN SENSE OF WHICH WAY THE WIND BLOWING HAD BROUGHT THAT
FIGURE DOWN SUBSTANTIALLY SINCE ARRIVAL OF MOROCCAN FORCES.
BASRI PREDICTED THAT GOM WOULD BE SURFACING SOME
POLISARIO DEFECTORS IN NEXT FEW DAYS.

G. HIGH-LEVEL VISITORS: BASRI EXPECTED PRIME MINISTER
OSMAN TO VISIT SAHARA IN VERY NEAR FUTURE BUT HAD NO PREDICTION
ON DATE OF VISIT PROMISED BY KING. KING'S ARRIVAL IN SAHARA
WAS SEEN BY OBSERVERS AS IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN MOROCCAN
CONSOLIDATION, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF KING'S RELIGIOUS ROLE.

5. VISITORS PROCEEDED BY MILITARY HELICOPTERS
DEC. 23 TO SMARA AND SMALL OUTLYING MILITARY POSTS OF JDIRIYA,
ABOUT 150 KILOMETERS FRBM ALGERIAN BORDER.

A. SMARA: THE COMMANDING OFFICER, LT. COLONEL BEN
OTHMAN, STATED THAT HIS BRIGADE HAD MET NO RESISTANCE ON
ENTERING SMARA NOV. 27 (CONTRARY TO REPORTS THAT HEAVY
FIGHTING HAD OCCURED), AND THAT HE HAD NOT SEEN SLIGHTEST
TRACE OF POLISARIO SINCE ARRIVAL. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT MANY
INHABITANTS HAD FLED THE TOWN BECAUSE OF "MISINFORMATON," BUT
SAID THEY WERE NOW GRADUALLY RETURNING, AS THEIR CONFIDENCE
IN MOROCCANS GREW. BEN OTHMAN TOOK GROUP ON THOROUGH
TOUR OF TOWN, WHICH SHOWED NO SIGNS OF ANY RECENT FIGHTING,
AND OF SURROUNDING DESERT, INCLUDING TEA WITH REGUIBAT TRIBAL
ELDERS WHO PROFESSED ENTHUSIASTIC LOYALTY TO MOROCCO.

B. JDIRIYA (ECHDEIRIA-2714N-1027W): COMMANDING OFFICER,
LT. COLONEL OUALI, INDICATED HIS UNIT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR
COVERING THE AREA UP TO EASTERN BORDER, ALTHOUGH FARSIYA,
AN OUTPOST FARTHER EAST, HAD RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAIN
INFILTRATION ROUTE FROM ALGERIA. JDIRIYA SITE, A FORMER
SPANISH STRONGPOINT, HAD BEEN HELD SINCE MID-NOVEMBER.
THERE HAD BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS AT SITE ITSELF, BUT,
HE RELATED, CLASHES HAD OCCURRED WITHIN 20 OR SO KILOMETERS
TOWARD SOUTHEAST, THE LAST ONE ABOUT TWO WEEKS BEFORE.
OUALI DESCRIBED POLISARIO AS WELL ORGANIZED IN SMALL GROUPS,
AND WELL EQUIPPED AND DRESSED. THUS FAR, HOWEVER,
POLISARIO HAD BEEN OBSERVED TO HAVE ONLY SMALL ARMS BUT
NOT SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS OF ANY KIND. POLISARIO HAD SOME
LAND ROVERS WITH SAHARAN LICENSE PLATES, BUT OPERATED NO
AIRCRAFT NOR HAD ANY ALGERIAN PLANES OF ANY KIND BEEN
SIGHTED IN JDIRIYA SECTOR. SOME POLISARIO PRISONERS
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HAD BEEN TAKEN, BUT ALL HAD BEEN SAHARANS. SITUATION IN FARSIYA WAS LIVLIER, OUALI QUIPPED, WITH GARRISON SUBJECTED TO NIGHT ATTACKS ALTHOUGH WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT CONSEQUENCES. OUALI THOUGHT THAT ELIMINATION OF POLISARIO WOULD TUDE TIME, ALTHOUGH MATTERS WERE IMPROVING WITH PERIODIC RETURN TO THE FOLD OF POLISARIO GROUPS, SOME OF WHICH HAD SURRENDERED AS UNITS WITH THEIR WEAPONS. ASKED ABOUT MAHBES, OUALI DESCRIBED THE TOWN AS THE MOST IMPORTANT POLISARIO CENTER THIS SIDE OF TINDOUF. THERE WERE NO MOROCCANS PRESENT THERE, HE INDICATED. (THIS STATEMENT CONTRADICTED A PRIVATE REVELATION TO JOURNALISTS BY DRISS BASRI, WHO MAINTAINED THAT MOROCCANS HAD ESTABLISHED POLICE AND CUSTOMS CONTROL IN MCHBES). OUALI STATED ALSO THAT MOROCCANS HAD NOT YET ARRIVED AT TIFARITI, BUT ARMY WAS READY TO GO THERE AND TO MAHBES AS SOON AS THE ORDER CAME.

6. COMMENT: MOROCCAN MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE GROUND IN SAHARA IS MASSIVE BY LOCAL STANDARDS AND IMPRESSIVE FOR APPARENT DISCIPLINE AND ESPRIT OF TROOPS. WEAK POINT IS PRESUMABLY AIR POWER; VISITOR DETECTED NO MOROCCAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT AT ANY OF THE SAHARAN AIR STRIPS. POLISARIO, EVEN THOUGH GUERRILLAS' NEEDS PROBABLY FEW, WOULD NOT SEEM CAPABLE OF STANDING UP FOR LONG AGAINST RELATIVE MOROCCAN MILITARY MIGHT AND IN A HIGHLY INHOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT WHERE SPOTTING FROM AIR RELATIVELY EASY, WERE IT NOT FOR BASES AT

SUCH POINTS AS MAHBES AND TINDOUF. MOROCCANS MEANWHILE APPEAR TO BE BIDDING THEIR TIME CONCERNING MOVE ON MAHBES, NO DOUBT WISHING TO CONSOLIDATE HOLD ON VILLA CISNEROS AND OTHER RELATIVELY ACCESSIBLE REGIONS BEFORE RISKING MORE DIRECT CLASH WITH ALGERIANS IN NORTHEASTERN SAHARA.

7. LESS CONVINCING TO SAHARA VISITORS THAN MOROCCAN MILITARY PRESENCE WAS PROCESS OF "CONSULTATION" WITH SAHARANS. IT IS CLEAR THAT MOROCCANS VIEW CONSULTATION AS HAVING ALREADY TAKEN PLACE. WHILE MOROCCANS APPARENTLY HAVE HAD NO TROUBLE RALLYING "LOYAL" ELEMENTS, SUCH LOYALTY IS, AS DRISS BASRI IMPLIED, CONDITIONED ON MOROCCANS' MAINTAINING STRONG UPPER HAND. CONFIDENTIAL

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AT SAME TIME, PRIMITIVE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SAHARAN POPULATION, THEIR SMALL NUMBERS (74,000 ACCORDING TO LAST YEAR'S SPANISH CENSUS), AND ONGOING GUERRILLA WARFARE WOULD SEEM TO MAKE ANY MEANINGFUL POLLING IMPRACTICAL IN ANY CASE.

8. ANOTHER MAJOR FUTURE STICKING POINT WOULD APPEAR TO BE
DIVISION OF TERRITORY WITH MAURITANIA, DESPITE
CONTINUING PROFESSIONS OF BROTHERHOOD FROM BOTH SIDES. WITH
A DEFINITE DIVIDING LINE APPARENTLY NOT ESTABLISHED AT THIS
LATE DATE, MOROCCAN MILITARY PREPONDERANCE COULD WELL RESULT
IN MAURITANIA'S ENDING UP WITH A LOT OF SAND.
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